

GENERAL TIPS

The court is a very traditional and polite place where a certain demeanor (way of acting) is expected. When you are representing yourself, you are trying to persuade a judge that you are right. You must act and speak in a way that helps you with your case.

Before You Begin

- Designate a notebook or folder to hold all of your court records and forms and to record all of the activities related to the case.
- Keep all of your legal papers and case related documents in one place and organized.
- Keep track of all conversations you have with others regarding your case.

Preparing Your Forms

- Make sure you have chosen the correct forms for your case. Read the instructions carefully before you complete the forms.
- Make sure that all of the required information is attached to the forms and documents.
- Be prepared to pay the filing fees required for your specific court matter at the time you file the papers.
- Make photocopies for your own records.

Preparing for Court

- Representing yourself in court is a big decision. In many matters, such as a disputed divorce or a complicated child custody case, it may be best to get legal advice. You may need to consult an attorney to determine that you are doing the right thing and that you are fully prepared for the court hearing. If you are unsure, it may be best to seek the help of an attorney.
- Look over the forms and materials you are going to present in court. Make sure they are filled in accurately and completely and that you have made the proper number of copies for the court.
- Make notes before you go to court so you are prepared and know exactly what you want to say.
- Be prepared to provide any information requested by judges and court staff.

Remember: The judge cannot speak to you about your case except when your case is in court and when the other party is there. Court staff can help you with questions such as when your hearing is scheduled but they cannot give you legal advice or recommendations about what you should do.

- Dress professionally, as you would for an important event. This means that your clothing should be neat and clean and that you are well-groomed.

Going to Court

- Be sure to take your notebook in which you have recorded all related events, along with all case-related documents. Take paper and a pen for notes. You may need to prepare other necessary documents after the hearing.
- *Be on time!* The court has a very busy schedule. If you are late, your case might be postponed to another date or dismissed entirely. You also could have a judgment or unfavorable ruling made against you if you are not there to defend your case.
- Make sure you know how to act in court.

Other Tips

- Always remember the four "Ps": Professionalism - Punctuality - Politeness - Preparation.
- Be sure to provide the court with changes to your address or phone number.
- Respond to court notices and correspondence as soon as possible.